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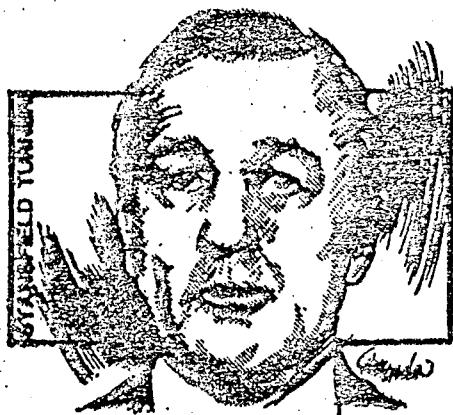
The Shrinking U.S. Navy

The authoritative British publication on world sea power, "Jane's Fighting Ships," says in its 1980-81 forward that the Soviet Union is now engaged in the largest naval and merchant shipbuilding program of the century.

Hitherto, the Soviet navy has been a coastal force of small, well-armed ships. That's changing. The first of the Kiev-class small aircraft carriers recently emerged, giving USSR airpower longer reach.

Now, Jane's says, the USSR is building its first supercarrier, a nuclear-powered vessel in the 75,000-ton class. Further, Jane's reports three more are planned, to challenge, ship for ship, America's four-ship, nuclear-carrier fleet.

Further, Russia is well along with four new classes of battle cruisers and is building 10 submarines a year. The present sub force includes 70 nuclear-powered boats with ballistic-missile capability, and 32 are armed



with missiles of sufficient range to hit North American targets when fired from Soviet waters.

The United States has 41 nuclear submarines with ballistic-missile capability. Most of the boats are nearing obsolescence. Seven replacements are under construction.

The Soviet Union is moving at sea from a defensive posture to the projection of naval power around the world. It intends to match the American carrier group as an instrument of power, to deprive the United States of superiority in this area.

The developments become truly alarming when compared with the present state of the U.S. Navy and future budget allotments for it. Instead of growth, the prospects are for erosion of strength.

The American Navy is under inordinate strain, a one-and-a-half ocean fleet trying to operate in three oceans. Short of ships, it is

also losing trained men because pay and benefits are scandalously low. Ship departures are delayed until officers can literally press sufficient hands from other vessels to make up a minimum crew.

Stansfield Turner, the retired admiral who directs the CIA, notes in the Navy publication, "Proceedings," that the fleet has declined in the past decade from just under 1,000 to 450 ships, and combat aircraft have dwindled from 2,700 to 1,700.

Says Adm. Turner: "The mathematics of inadequate procurement spells shrinkage. If we take the number of ships that we have actually procured over the last 10 years and which are programmed for the next five, it averages about 15 ships a year. Average ship life, minesweeper to carrier, is about 22 years. Twenty-two times 15 is 330. We are today, for the last decade, for the next five (years), planning to sustain a Navy of 330 ships. If 22 is too conservative, make it 25. You now have a 375-ship navy. Stretch it to 30 years. You now have a 450-ship navy, the same as we have today. We are not growing in ships and the story in aircraft is much the same."

How, then, is the Carter administration moving to deal with this dangerous trend?

"Sea Power," published by the Navy League, says in a recent issue that the services are working on 1982 financial plans, and all face severe restraints imposed by Defense Secretary Harold Brown.

Navy Secretary Edward Hidalgo told Mr. Brown, the magazine reports, that these restraints will cost the Navy 10 new ships, leave it short of "hundreds" of aircraft, and do nothing to reverse the exodus of underpaid personnel.

Specifically, Mr. Hidalgo says the Navy must postpone building three attack submarines, two fleet missile-defense cruisers, and five frigates, all proposed by Congress in previous planning. In addition, the Navy normally buys 230 aircraft annually, "about 100 short of what is needed to meet attrition and to maintain force structure. We buy only 199 in FY (financial year) 1982, including 74 trainers, and 185 in FY 1983."

President Carter says he will never allow America to become No. 2, in any area of defense. Jane's says America would already fight at a numerical disadvantage in some categories of ships if a sea war occurred today. And the Soviets' massive building program is designed to give them total superiority.

Mr. Carter appears to be incompetent in simple arithmetic. The Navy is shrinking and all he does is pronounce baseless words of reassurance.